

## Can Turkey Achieve its Domestic Nuclear Ambitions?

This blog post was first posted to the International Centre for Security Analysis blog on the 8th July 2015.

As Turkey's nuclear energy programme slowly progresses with the ceremonial [ground breaking](#) for the first Russian-built plant at Akkuyu, and the ratification of the [intergovernmental agreement](#) with Japan for the second plant at Sinop, President Erdogan and other senior government officials continue to promote the idea of a fully domestic nuclear capability. This ambition is in line with their wider domestic agenda ahead of the 2023 centenary of the Turkish Republic; widely interpreted as an attempt by the Justice and Development party (AKP) to drum up nationalistic support.

The transition from foreign financing to complete domestic ownership is a crucial element of Turkey's nuclear energy agenda. The first plant is being fully financed by Russian energy giant Rosatom; while the second is a joint venture between Japanese and French companies with Turkey seeking a greater share in the project. It is currently understood that Turkey's second nuclear power plant will be a 65% share for the Japanese-French consortium of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Itochu, and GDF Suez with Turkey's state-run power producer Elektrik Üretim AŞ (EÜAŞ) taking a 35% stake. However in May the chief executive of EÜAŞ announced that the company expects to own up to [49%](#) of the country's second nuclear power plant at Sinop. This reflects Turkey's growing desire to become more energy independent and fulfill its ambition to achieve full domestic ownership of the third plant.

Yet concrete plans for Turkey's third nuclear power plant remain elusive, with a number of possible [site suggestions](#) including: Igneada in the Kırklareli Black Sea province, Akcakoca, Ankara and Tekirdag. Analysts believe the proposed plant will provide power to one of Turkey's largest cities, either Istanbul or Ankara. Furthermore, details surrounding the construction and operation of the plant continue to lack clarity. In October 2014 Prime Minister Davutoğlu announced that the third plant would be a [‘100% domestic project.’](#)

However, a month later US-based Westinghouse Electric Company (a subsidiary of Toshiba Group), China's State Nuclear Power Technology Corporation and Turkey's Electricity Generation Company announced an agreement to enter into [exclusive negotiations](#) to construct a four unit nuclear power plant site in Turkey with AP1000 reactor technology. This clearly suggests that the proposed plant may not be a wholly national project and that the ambitious rhetoric may not be reflected in reality.



Pointing to a nationalistic future? President Erdoğan addresses the Turkish Parliament. Source: Reuters.

Despite the three companies announcing an agreement, there have been no further developments (to public knowledge), and Turkey is still ostensibly pursuing its domestic ambitions. In February Turkey completed its selection process to send a further [80 students](#) to study nuclear engineering in Russia. This is part of an education scheme between the two countries under which Russia is already training around 250 Turkish students in the nuclear field. The hope thereafter is to establish a domestic workforce for the future plants.

Yet the effectiveness of these efforts remain unclear. Educating a skilled future nuclear workforce and investing greater capital into the projects are certainly necessary

preconditions if Turkey is to develop an advanced domestic nuclear energy industry. However, significant questions remain as to whether Turkey's efforts are sufficient to achieve the political goals set out by President Erdoğan.

More significantly, the nuclear energy programme is just one strand in Turkey's nationalistic agenda that is characterised by a significant gap between rhetoric and reality. Indeed, similar tensions exist in Turkey's indigenous space and defence sectors. On 21<sup>st</sup> May President Erdoğan heralded Turkey's first steps into the space industry by opening the nation's first [satellite test centre](#) with the hope that Turkish Aerospace Industries would eventually become one of the top 20 aviation companies worldwide. In the same month the President announced that Turkey would [achieve independence](#) from imported defence equipment by 2023. However, industry analysts have expressed doubt over both these assertions; claiming them to be unrealistic.

Undoubtedly, the common threat to Turkey's nationalistic and nuclear visions is domestic political uncertainty. The June elections witnessed a popular rejection of President Erdoğan's authoritarian tendencies and coincided with a number of troubling trends in the Turkish economy. Together, these factors increase uncertainty and undermine domestic ambitions. Moreover, the slow pace of development at the Akkuyu and Sinop nuclear power plants, particularly in comparison to the [UAE's](#) nuclear programme which was launched around the same time, calls into question the viability of a wholly domestic third nuclear power plant.

Turkey's domestic nuclear energy ambitions, like its wider nationalistic agenda, remains prominent in official rhetoric but lacks concrete achievements.